

carried it out, with the Order of St John de Lateran ! It may mitigate the guilt of Francis to say that he was the dupe of Cardinal Tournon, but ignorance is a poor palliative in the case of an absolute potentate who signed the order of execution and approved of it by letters royal. Even the inquiry directed, on grounds of justice by Henry II., was but a sham, and resulted in the exculpation, with one insignificant exception, of the perpetrators, from Baron D'Oppede downwards.

This truculent policy of repression was dictated as much by the autocrat as the bigot. In the view of the morbid

monarch, heresy came to mean rebellion against the crown as well as against the Church. In the edict of 1543 the heretics

are denounced as "seditious perturbers of the repose of the kingdom, secret conspirators against the prosperity of our State, rebels, and disobedient against us and our justice."

" Give the people a new religion/'said the papal nuncio to the sensitive king, " and they will soon demand a new prince."

The insinuation was a calumny invented by the bigots in order the better to compass the destruction of their antagonists.

Unlike in Germany, the spread of the new creed in France

was not accompanied by the growth of a rebellious spirit in the masses. There was indeed no lack of provocation to

rebellion in the excessive taxation imposed to maintain the

chronic wars of Francis against his great rival Charles V., in

the misery consequent on bad harvests and pestilence. In

spite of the splendours of the reign of the magnificent

humanist king, the realm was not prosperous, the people far

from contented. His government was a tissue of maladminis

tration, notwithstanding occasional reforming edicts, which

were not properly enforced. " Corruption is everywhere,"

notes the Venetian ambassador, Cavalli, in 1546. "If all the swindlers were to be hanged, there would scarcely remain a treasurer-general in France/' The blame might be with the royal officials rather than with their master. But Francis was an incurable spendthrift, who claimed and practised the right to fleece the people *ad libitum*. He posed as the absolute monarch *par excellence*^ never summoned the States-General, paid no heed to the remonstrances of the Provincial States, and browbeat the Parliament of Paris by *Lettres-de-Jussion*. He had little or none of the solicitude of his

VOL. a. L